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ABSTRACT

Psychosocial adaptations are sometimes affected by experiences that are ordinarily considered to be amusements. In 1974, a field study was undertaken by the Program on Psychosocial Adaptation and the Future to determine if it is possible to measure the effect of television on adult viewers. A sample of 260 couples, controlled for demographic characteristics and attitudes, was divided into five groups; each group was assigned to watch one of five diets of television programing; (1) high in helpful content; (2) high in hurtful content; (3) neutral; (4) mixed; and (5) self-selected. After 20 hours of viewing, subjects were given mood adjective checklist tests. Results suggest that some types of emotionally arousing programing may decrease aggressive manifestations. Results for hurtful programing were not conclusive. A tabular summary of the data is provided. (EMH)

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Mass Entertainment and Human Survival:

Television's Potential for Prosocial Effects on Adults

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IR003408

Mass Entertainment and Human Survival:
Television's Potential for Prosocial Effects on Adults

David Loye

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The rather involved title of my paper reflects two ways of looking at our subject, prosocial effects of television. "Mass Entertainment and Human Survival" is the general project title for the television studies at the U.C.L.A. School of Medicine which I will report. The title and studies derive from views expressed in The Human Agenda, a book by the founder and director for this program, U.C.L.A. associate professor of psychiatry and author Roderic Gorney. Quite simply put, Gorney's guiding notion was this. Here we are at a juncture in history where technology has presented us with the opportunity either to dramatically advance or to degrade and possibly annihilate ourselves. In mass entertainment we have on hand what appears to be a powerful tool for driving us one way or the other.

To Gorney, a psychiatrist, this seemed evident enough. But when he turned to psychological and sociological research for confirmation of his assumption that mass entertainment is a powerful tool for affective, cognitive and conative change, he encountered the picture with which we are all familiar. Something is known of certain kinds of television effects on children, but on what this means there is disagreement. As for adults, the only appreciable field study--by Stanley Milgram with CBS financing--failed to show any effects.

The purpose of our study, which was funded by The Lilly Endowment, then became to reconcile a contradiction between the clinical observations of Gorney and other psychiatrists that

television does have effects on adults, and a lack of support for these observations by so-called hard-nosed research. Our purpose was to find evidence of effects, and also to gain a sense of exactly what kinds of effects television has not on a theoretical stick man or woman, but on the psychosocial functioning of the whole person on a full range of response levels.

My own relation to all of this was that of a latterday television turncoat, if you will. I was involved in the industry's formative years as a writer, film producer, newsman, TV Guide editor, and advertising agency account executive. Later I gained a doctorate in social psychology with grounding in psychological and sociological research and theory and in measurement techniques.

The approach we took was to sound out a large number of industry figures and researchers to build a study that would be a logical extension into the adult context of the best work with children. In certain important ways, for example, our basic design derives from the prosocial versus violence, helping versus hurting, emphases of the studies of Aletha Stein and Lynette Friedrich, and Bob Liebert and Paul Ekman for the Surgeon General's Report. Another major design element, suggested by NBC researchers, was the use of cable television to gain access to the natural viewing situation--to enter directly into the homes of the adults who worked with us not as "subjects" in the old sense, but as "participants" in a hopeful new sense for adult television research.

Specifically, through announcements over Theta Cable Television in Los Angeles we obtained a pool of 1450 research volunteers, most of them

couples, husbands and wives. Out of this pool, through a combination of matching and randomization, we selected 260 participating couples and formed groups watching five diets of television programming: 1) high in helpful or prosocial behavior; 2) high in hurtful or violent behavior; 3) neutral, or so-called light entertainment; 4) mixed, including both helpful and hurtful behavior; and 5) natural. This last group was told to do whatever they wished during the viewing period, but to log their activities so that we might obtain a picture of normal viewing patterns and the relation of TV to other activities for the sample as a whole. The reason for the couples' involvement was to provide a method whereby the husband watched the television and the wife worked with us as a participant-observer reporting his daily behavior, both plus and minus. The exposure was between 7:00 to 11:00 p.m. every evening Monday through the following Sunday for the third week in October 1974. Selection of the program diets was guided by pilot test assessments of helpful versus hurtful program types by psychiatrists, psychologists, parents and other groups.

The number of couples who completed this viewing study ranges between 183 and 227, depending on the variable being studied. The group was dominantly Caucasian, more affluent and better educated than the American norm--but at the same time much more typical of the American viewer than most other studies in that we were working with a wide range of normal, everyday, adult TV viewers, in their homes, rather than atypical college students assessed in labs. Particularly of interest was an age span for our participants from 20 to over 70, thus laying a base for findings with implications for developmental studies.

One other aspect of the methodology is important to convey before we examine results. This is the nature of the measurement battery, which I selected and designed to assess the whole person for two very practical reasons. One was that coming into the field of television research relatively cold--my interests as a scholar had only a tenuous relation to my earlier experience as a communicator--I was surprised to find so little of the known measurement armamentarium being used in television studies. It seemed likely this was why so little was known about television effects. The other reason was that both research and theory prior to this study indicated little hope for our finding much with a field study of adults, hence my strategy was to maximize the sensitivity of instruments and measure everything possible hoping to find at least one useful response and measurement technique.

What we set out to measure, then, may be visualized in terms of a general model of television effects I developed to aid data analysis and theorizing. This will be shown as a slide, to be followed by other slides displaying a sampling of our results.

Slide 1--Figure 1: Basic Psychosocial Functioning Model of Television Effects

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This is a visualization of television effects in an information processing-flow charting format familiar to systems theorists. Up at the top of what appears to be a stack of boxes we see the initiating stimulus--an activated television set. We then sought to measure response to this

stimulus at the levels and by the means indicated--ideation, by a new instrument developed for this purpose; mood, by a variant of the Nowlis mood checklist; fantasy, by the Barron Ink Blots; attitudes, by another new measure developed for this purpose by Dr. Gorney and research coordinator Gary Steele; values, by the Rokeach Value Survey; self-concept (as well as many other relevant variables), using the Comrey Personality Scale and an extensive demographic-media use questionnaire; and lastly behavior, by the husband-wife, participant-observer method we indicated earlier.

Slide 2--Table 1: Mood Factors

During the week participants in all five groups watched a total of 149 programs, before and after each of which they filled out either a program report or a mood checklist. The resulting mountain of approximately 140,000 ratings of adjectives was reduced to scores on 12 mood factors. The most interesting of these for our purposes were the hypothetically plus mood factors of social affection and surgency, and the hypothetically minus mood factors of aggression and anxiety.

Slide 3--Table 2: Ranking of Prosocial Programs for Inducing Social Affection

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This slide conveys a number of things relevant to the interest of this panel in prosocial programming. For example, the programs shown are those in the prosocial "diet." They range from series like The Waltons

to the unusually fine special, The Cay. You may note The Waltons show up frequently, with numbers ranging from 1 to 6. The reason is that despite all the ballyhoo of last fall as the great season for prosocial programming, even with 17 channels to draw on in the L.A. area, we couldn't begin to fill our prosocial diet off the air. So we had to broadcast additional episodes of The Waltons, the only prosocial series we could obtain, via limited-access channels into our cable television subscriber homes.

This slide shows the programs, in positions 1 through 6, which produced the most social affection--three episodes of the Waltons, Mary Tyler Moore, Friends and Lovers, and MASH.

Slide 4--Figure 2: Trends for Aggressive Mood, Prosocial Group

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Another perspective on mood is provided by examining mood change over the week. This was the pattern for the mood of aggression in those viewing the prosocial programming. If you collapse all this action you have a general decline in aggressive mood for the prosocial programming viewers throughout the week.

Slide 5--Figure 3: Aggressive Mood:
Comparison of A and B Group Means for Baseline MCL Scores, Monday-Sunday

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The solid line in this figure is another way of viewing the decline in aggressive mood for the prosocial viewing group. However, here we may see this trend in comparison with the aggressive mood level for the group

watching a diet of programs high in violence--Hawaii Five-O, Cannon, Mannix, etc. Note that with the exception of an as-yet-inexplicable reversal at the start of the week, the trend is for the violent diet to maintain aggressive mood level, while the prosocial diet reduces it.

Specifically, both groups began the week with almost identical means for aggressive mood. By the end of the first evening's viewing, aggressive mood had decreased for the prosocial viewing group and increased for the violence viewing group to yield a difference in means significant at the .05 level. As you can see here, with the exception of the reversal for Tuesday, this trend continued for a majority of nights throughout the week.

Slide 6--Figure 4: Program Report Scores and Profile for All in the Family

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Ideation is measured by an instrument which I developed to assess the degree to which programs are perceived in terms of nine dimensions. This is one way of reporting results--as a profile that can be read either as a holistic program imprint or in terms of the separate dimensions. The participant is asked to rate each program for the degree to which he feels it is emotionally, aesthetically, morally, or intellectually arousing and/or satisfying. These assessments are shown here as the shaded portion above the boxes labeled E, A, M, and I. The black bar in the middle, labeled E, is a global rating for entertainment.

Here we see the profile for the controversial All in the Family, which we found registering a pattern of special interest in this context.

Most of the top comedies show impact on the left side of the entertainment bar--for emotional and aesthetic arousal. All in the Family--and also Good Times, both Norman Lear productions--were unusual among comedies in showing impact on the right side of the E bar, for moral and intellectual arousal.

Slide 7--Figure 5: Program Report Scores and Profile for Bewitched

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This is an example of a low impact profile, for Bewitched.

Slide 8--Figure 6: Program Report Scores and Profile for The Cay

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In contrast here is what a really fine prosocial special can do. This is the profile for an exceptional drama last fall which stressed helping behavior--The Cay, starring James Earl Jones.

Slide 9--Table 3: Comparison of Emotional Arousal and Aggressive Mood Rank-Orderings

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This is a glance at something of considerable interest which our associate Cary Steele discovered last spring. Examining both mood and ideation data, Steele wondered if he might uncover anything new about the relation between emotional arousal and aggression by examining rank-order correlations.

As is well known, the Tannenbaum group at Berkeley has found that emotionally arousing films of many types will increase aggressive mood. This suggests that emotionally arousing films of a prosocial nature could increase aggression--and Aletha Stein and Lynette Friedrich found an effect of this nature with middle-class children in their study for the Surgeon General's Report. Steele, however, found a weak negative rank-order correlation between emotional arousal and aggression for those watching the prosocial diet. Not content to leave it there, he plotted the scores graphically and was intrigued to find that within the variance were the three distinct patterns indicated at the top of this figure--slightly different trends for the comedies, the dramas, and the apparently irritating "overdose" of Waltons episodes. By eliminating the comedies and The Waltons, and concentrating solely on the effects of the other prosocial dramas shown at the lower half of the table, he obtained an impressive negative .62 rank-order correlation between emotional arousal and aggressive mood. This indicates that with the viewing group watching prosocial dramas, as emotional arousal increased aggressive mood decreased. This does not happen with the violence-viewing group, which instead shows a slight increase in aggressive mood.

Slide 10--Figure 7: Plus Behavior Trends for A and B Groups

As indicated earlier, behavior was assessed by a technique I developed for obtaining wives' reports of husbands' "plus" and "minus" behavior. This slide shows weekly trends for the plus behavior of both the prosocial and the violence stimulus groups. There is essentially no difference.

Slide 11--Figure 8: Minus Behavior Trends for A and B Groups

Trend lines for minus behavior, however, begin to show the differences one would hypothesize. Throughout the week the violence-viewing group consistently shows more minus behavior than the prosocial group. This difference is significant at the .05 level on Wednesday and it is possible reanalysis may find significance for the week as a whole. At the same time we must note that the fact they both arrive at the same point on the last day of the study must raise the inevitable question about the possibility of catharsis acting within the violence-viewing group. The fact the groups start out at different levels must also raise questions.

I will present other data illuminating comparable complexities which those seeking simplistic answers might prefer to ignore. We will raise the complexities, noting however that the implication of our findings is that violence on television is a serious social issue for those concerned about adult behavior just as it is for those concerned about child behavior.

Slide 12--Figure 9: Linear Trend to Minus Behavior for All Groups

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Here is the kind of finding that must surely support mounting social concern about prosocial versus antisocial uses of television. This is a plotting of averaged daily means for minus behavior for all five treatment groups. To the far right we see the plus or prosocial stimulus group showing the least minus behavior. Next is the neutral group. Next those

who viewed both plus and minus programs. With the exception of the D group--free to do whatever they wished, and therefore able to display both more minus and more plus behavior to the observing wife--the highest for minus behavior is the violence-viewing group. The observable linearity here is significant beyond the .01 level.

Slide 13--Table 4: Increases in Rank Orderings of Values for A and B Groups

---

We have examined mood, ideation and behavior change. Now here is a first look at what happened to value structures.

These are the "ends" and "means" values for which the prosocial and violence viewing groups increased their rankings. In other words, following a week of the prosocial television diet, the value structure of the prosocial viewing group had shifted to such an extent that they rated the values of "inner harmony," "self respect," and "wisdom" as notably more important motivating "ends" than before their exposure to the week of programming.

But now with the violence-viewing B group we encounter a surprise that will take a great deal of stimulus content analysis and discussions to understand. For what hath the violence diet wrought? We find that a change has occurred with the two key cherished values for our political democracy-freedom and equality. Both are now valued more after this week of viewing the violence diet than they were before. Moreover, among "means" values, being "intellectual" and also "broadminded" are viewed as more important ways of gaining one's ends than before.

Slides out. Bring up lights for close.

The developer of the values measure we use, Milton Rokeach, was as surprised as we by this last finding. "It may be an error in data processing," Rokeach warned--and to some extent this warning could apply to other data of ours at this stage. For we are still in the early, surface-skimming stage of a lengthy process of data analysis that must inevitably change certain particulars of the first viewing. We also have much data on fantasy, attitude, personality and demographic variables yet to examine. And there are the questions of a follow-up to this analysis to determine how potent, lasting and general such changes may be.

The central tendency to our findings, however, is already obvious and unlikely to change. This study seems to refute the notion, both comforting to the industry and supported by previous research, that television entertainment has no appreciable effects on adults except to amuse and divert. This was a <u>field</u> study, subject to the familiar "wipeout" of effects through uncontrollable variables, not a laboratory study, with high variable control. This was a study not of children, within whom the path from stimulus to response can be through a relatively direct and open channel. It was a study of adults, within whom the stimulus is subject to immeasurably greater complexities of intervening processes before it can evoke measurable response. Finally, this was a study not of deviants, producing an extreme response range to facilitate measurement, but of normals, with a relatively flat response range severely taxing measurement sensitivity.

Within the context of previous knowledge and expectations and these study constraints, to find both mood and ideation change was surprising, to find behavioral change was startling, but to find value change from a single week's exposure still seems almost inconceivable. Yet this is what we found.

Conclusion

Whatever refinements further study--given the funds--may reveal, the central finding of this study will not change: it is that television entertainment does have effects on adults. Some of these effects are negative, supporting the fears of those concerned over the use of television to degrade and deflect us from the humanistic challenge. But some of these effects are positive, potentially greatly so. Our findings support the hopes of those who would like to see television put to far, far better social uses -- even possibly to help us survive as a species during a transitional time of grave danger to humankind.

TABLE 1

Mood Factors

Hypothesis	Mood Factors	Adjectives
Plus	Social Affection	affectionate, kindly, warmhearted, forgiving
Plus	Surgency	carefree, playful, witty, lively, talkative
Minus	Aggression	angry, defiant, rebellious, grouchy annoyed, fed up
Minus	Anxiety	clutched up, fearful, jittery
Arousal plus	Elation	elated, overjoyed, pleased, refreshed
Arousal plus	Vigor	active, energetic, vigorous
Arousal minus	Fatigue	drowsy, sluggish, tired, dull
Arousal minus	Nonchalance	leisurely, nonchalant
(None)	Concentration	concentrating, engaged in thought, intent, attentive, earnest, contemplative, introspective
(None)	Sadness	regretful, sad, sorry
(None)	Skepticism	dubious, skeptical, suspicious
(None)	Egotism	boastful, egotistic, self-centered, aloof

TABLE 2

RANKING OF PROSOCIAL PROGRAMS FOR INDUCING SOCIAL AFFECTION

Mean Scores		Standard Deviations	
1. Waltons 3	2.583	1. All in the Family	0.972
2. Mary Tyler Moore	2.514	2. Waltons 3	0.953
3. Waltons 1	2.479	3. Little House on Prairie	0.907
4. Friends & Lovers	2.477	4. Bewitched	0.904
5. Waltons 4	2.395	5. Maude	0.903
6. MASH	2.344	6. Rhoda	0.891
7. Waltons 2	2.321	7. Waltons 4	0.883
8. The Cay	2.307	8. Good Times	0.871
9. All in the Family	2.300	9. Mary Tyler Moore	0.864
9. Lucas Tanner	2.300	10. Movin' On	0.858
11. Waltons 6	2.268	11. Friends & Lovers	0.852
12. Good Times	2.240	12. The Cay	0.838
13. Tom Brown's Schooldays	2.192	13. Waltons 2	0.816
14. Medical Center	2.178	14. Lucas Tanner	0.807
15. Little House on Prairie	2.177	15. Waltons 1	0.794
16. Maude	2.146	16. Apple's Way	0.787
17. Rhoda	2.104	17. Tom Brown's Schooldays	0.779
18. Bewitched	2.073	18. Waltons 6	0.774
19. Movin' On	2.063	19. Poseidon Adventure	0.770
20. Apple's Way	2.054	20. MASH	0.765
21. Waltons 5	2.037	21. Medical Center	0.757
22. Marcus Welby	1.993	22. Waltons 5	0.727
23. Poseidon Adventure	1.967	23. Marcus Welby	0.711
MEAN FOR WEEK:	2.240	MEAN FOR WEEK:	0.834

TABLE 3

COMPARISON OF EMOTIONAL AROUSAL
AND AGGRESSION RANK ORDERINGS

Emotional Arousal	Aggression	Correlation*
I Dramas, Comedies, and The Waltons	Dramas, Comedies and The Waltons	$R' = -.25$ $p < .15$
II Dramas only	Dramas only	$R' = -.62$ $p < .02$
The Cay	Marcus Welby	
The Poseidon Adventure	Movin' On	
The Little House on the Prairie	Lucas Tanner	
Lucas Tanner	Tom Brown's Schooldays	
Tom Brown's Schooldays	Medical Center	
Marcus Welby	Apple's Way	
Medical Center	The Cay	
Apple's Way	The Little House on the Prairie	
Movin' On	The Poseidon Adventure	

* Rank order correlation

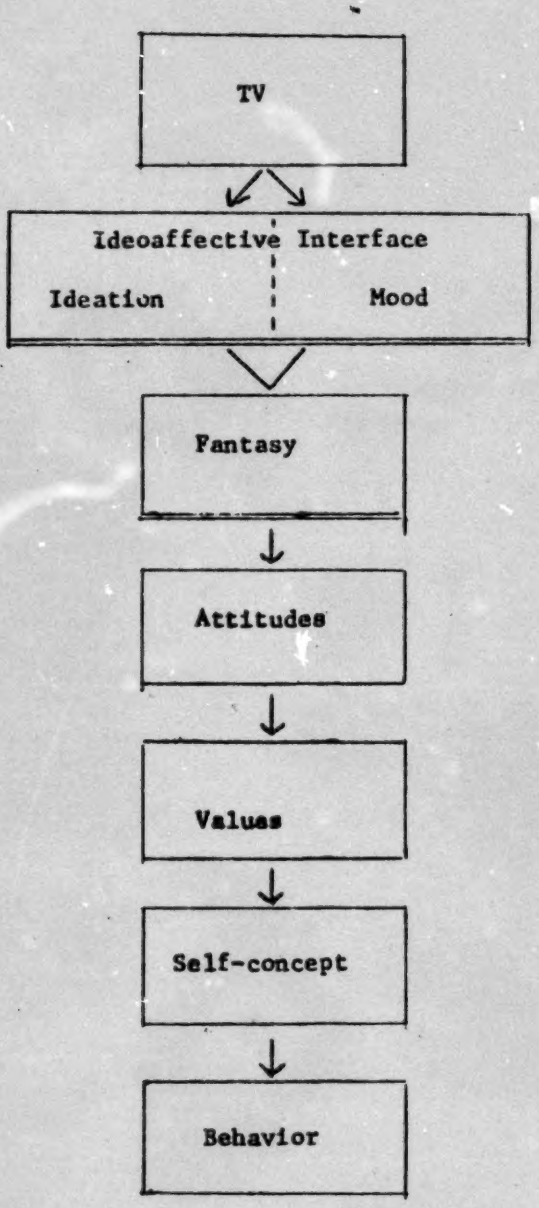
TABLE 4

INCREASES IN RANK ORDERINGS OF VALUES FOR A AND B GROUP

A Group		B Group	
Ends values		**Ends values**	
Inner harmony	4	Freedom	4
Self respect	3	Equality	4
Wisdom	3	Happiness	2
Pleasure	2	World of beauty	1
Comfortable life	1	Inner harmony	1
National security	1	Social recognition	1
Means values		**Means values**	
Broadminded	5	Intellectual	5
Cheerful	1	Broadminded	3
Forgiving	1	Responsible	2
Helpful	1	Forgiving	1
Imaginative	1	Helpful	1
Intellectual	1	Self-controlled	1

FIGURE 1

Basic Multi-Level Psychosocial Functioning Model
of Television Effects: Measures for Each Level



S-R Measurement

Stimulus
described by PSAF Plus-Minus Survey, program description and viewing content analysis, videotaping

Response
ideation measured by PSAF Program Report
mood measured by PSAF Mood Checklist

Response
fantasy measured by Barron Ink Blots

Response
attitudes measured by PSAF Attitude/ Values Scale

Response
values measured by Rokeach Value Survey

Response
self-concept measured by Comrey Personality Scale and Demographic-Media Use Questionnaire

Response
measured by Behavior Checklist and Plus-Minus Behavior Survey

FIGURE 2

Trends for Aggressive Mood, Prosocial Group

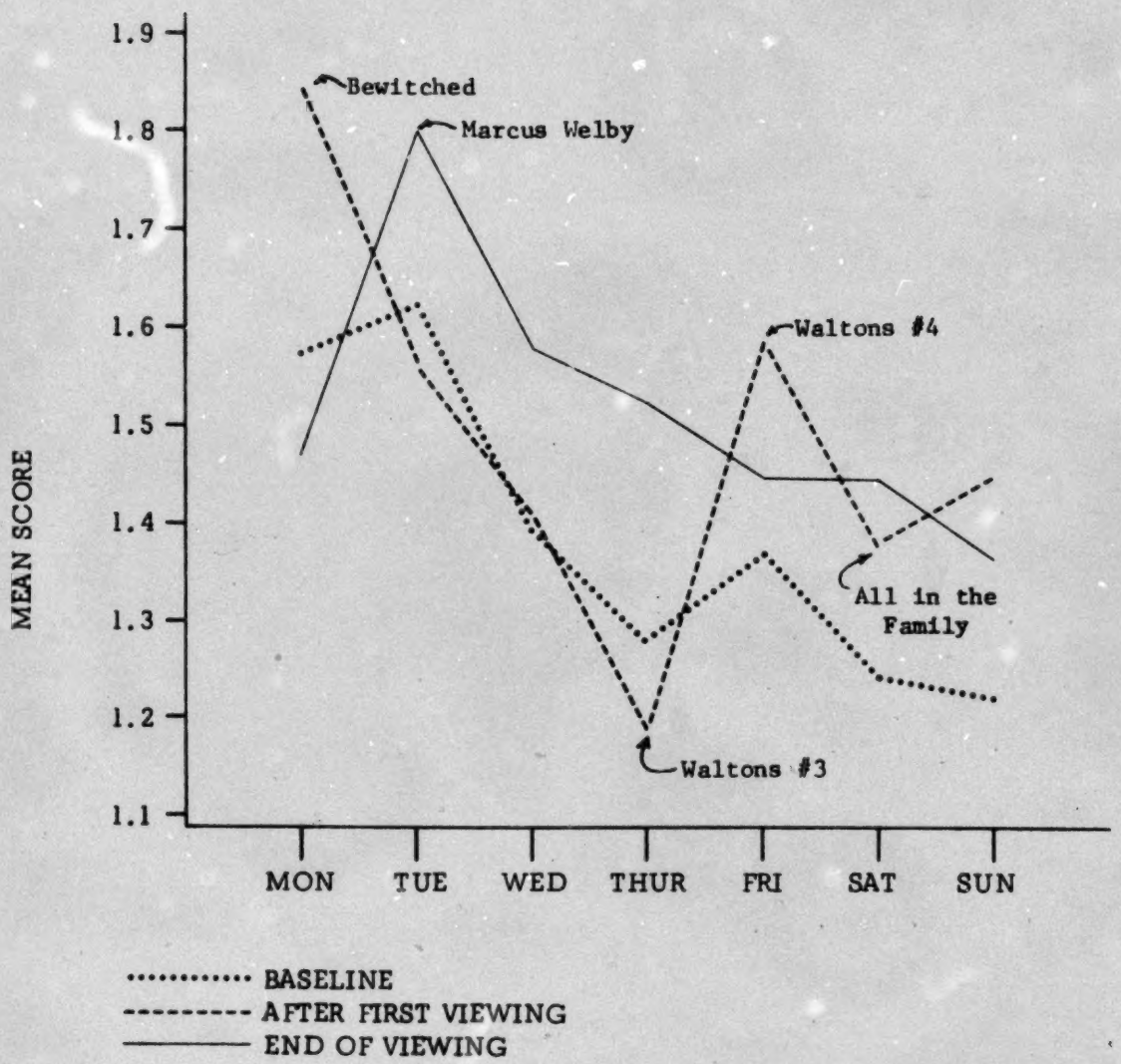


FIGURE 3

Aggressive Mood: Comparison of A and B Group Means

for Baseline MCL Scores, Monday-Sunday

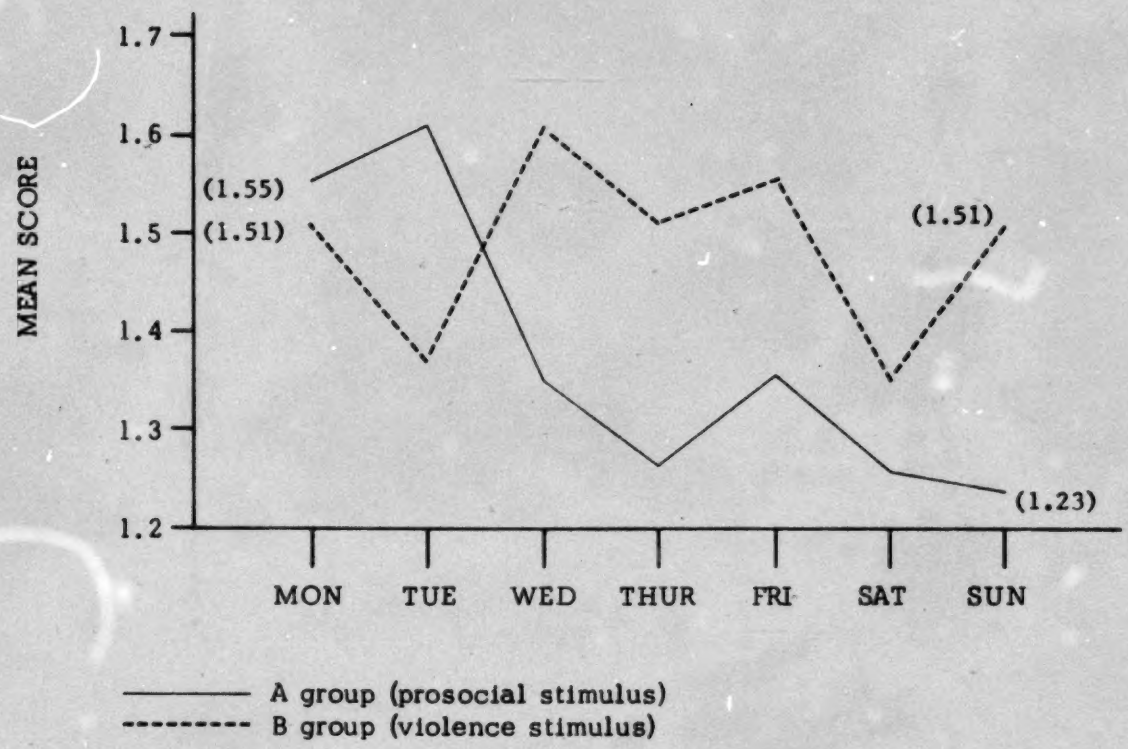
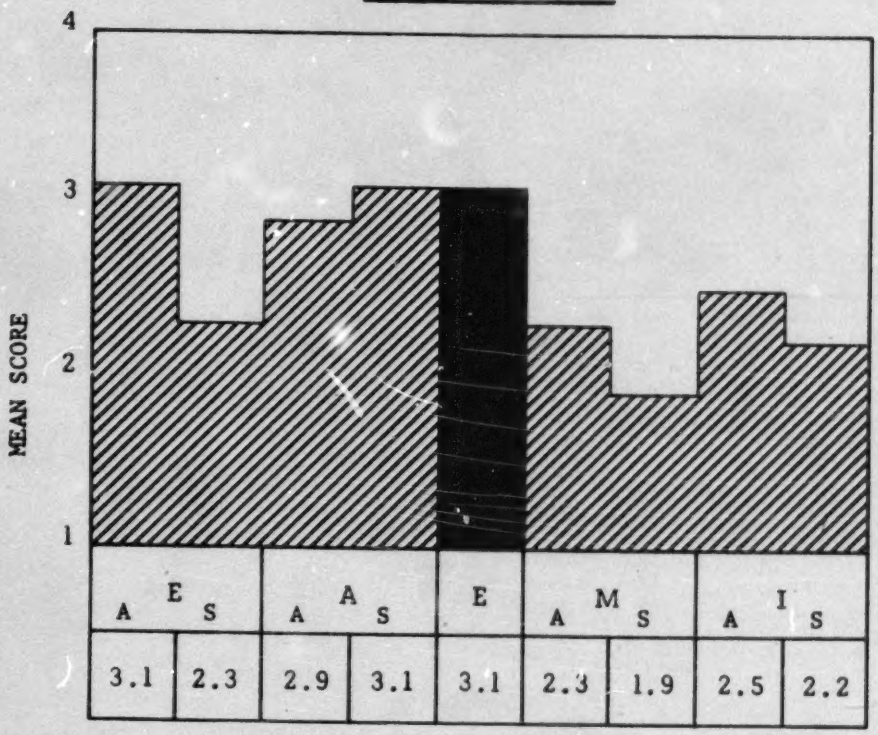


Figure 4

PROGRAM REPORT SCORES AND PROFILE

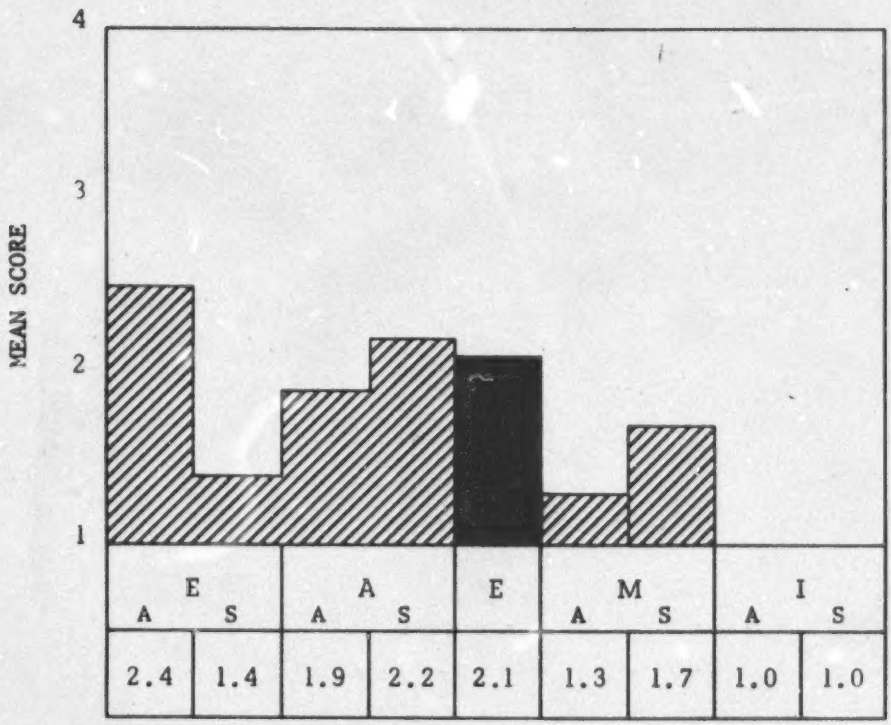
FOR ALL IN THE FAMILY



1 - Not at All
2 - A Little
3 - More Than A Little
4 - Very Definitely

Figure 5

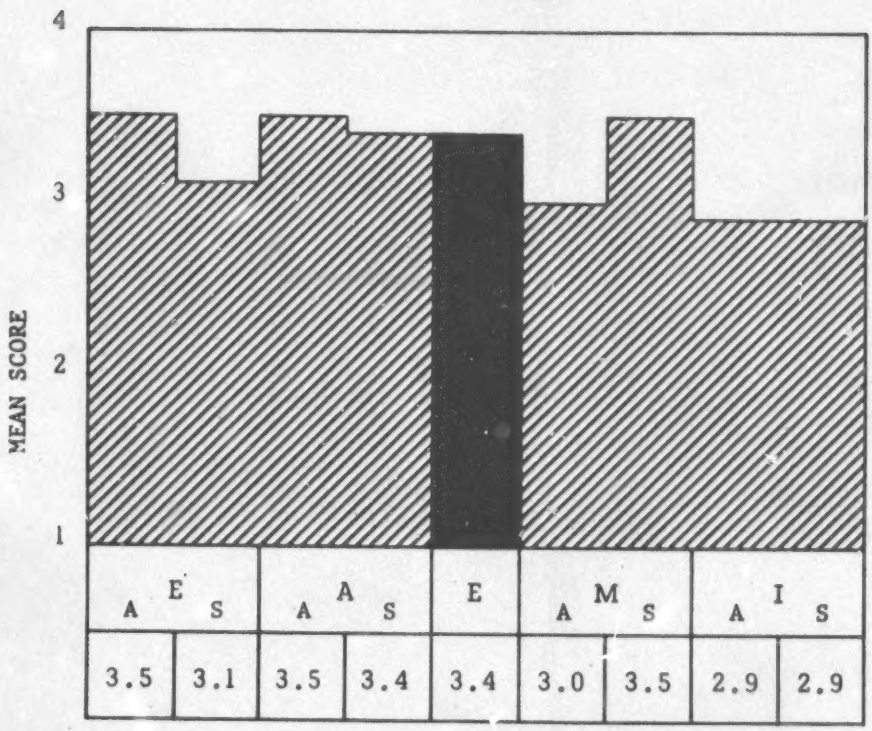
PROGRAM REPORT SCORES AND PROFILE
FOR BEWITCHED



1 - Not at All
2 - A Little
3 - More Than A Little
4 - Very Definitely

Figure 6

PROGRAM REPORT SCORES AND PROFILE
FOR THE CAY



1 - Not at All
2 - A Little
3 - More Than A Little
4 - Very Definitely

FIGURE 7

PLUS BEHAVIOR TRENDS FOR A AND B GROUPS

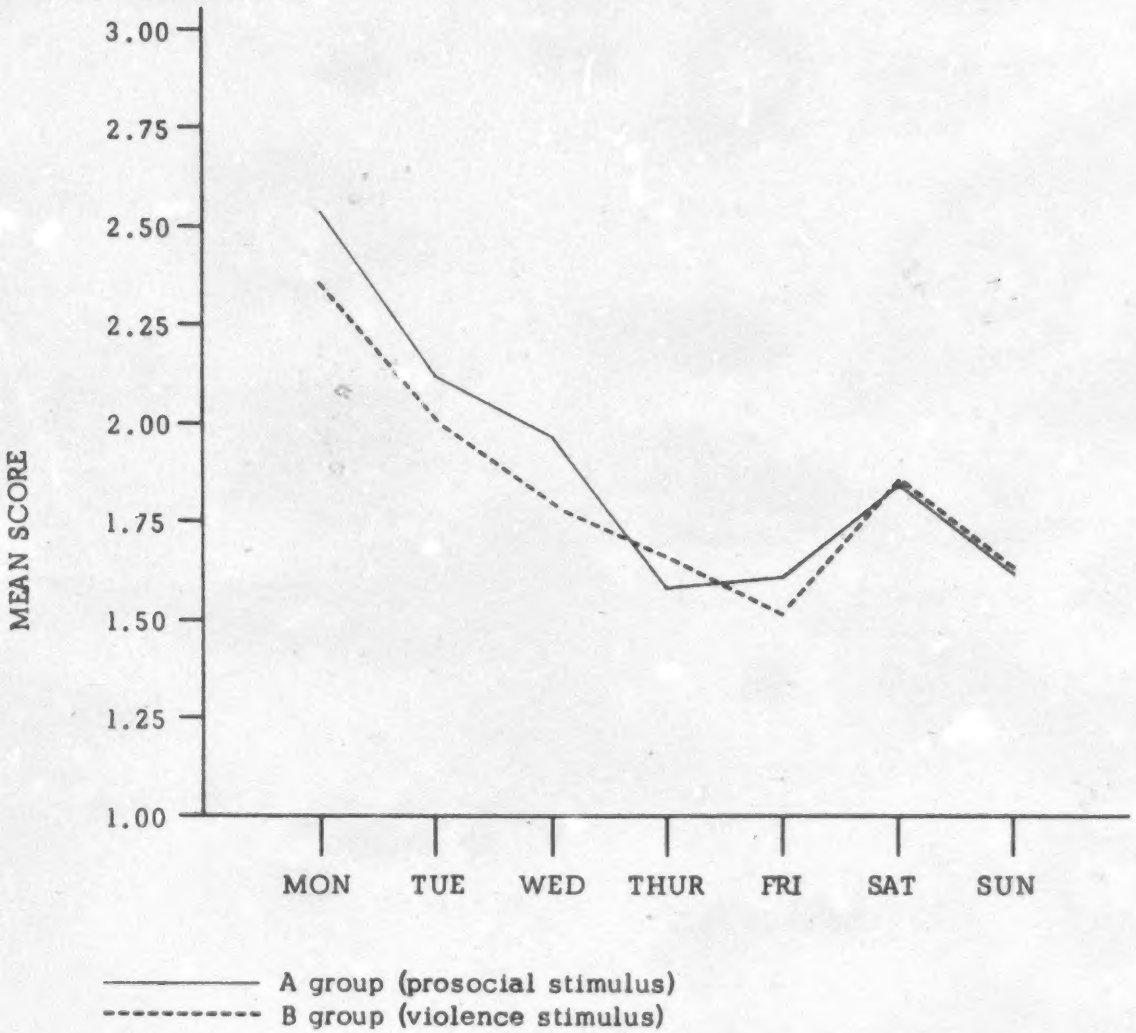


FIGURE 8

MINUS BEHAVIOR TRENDS FOR A AND B GROUPS

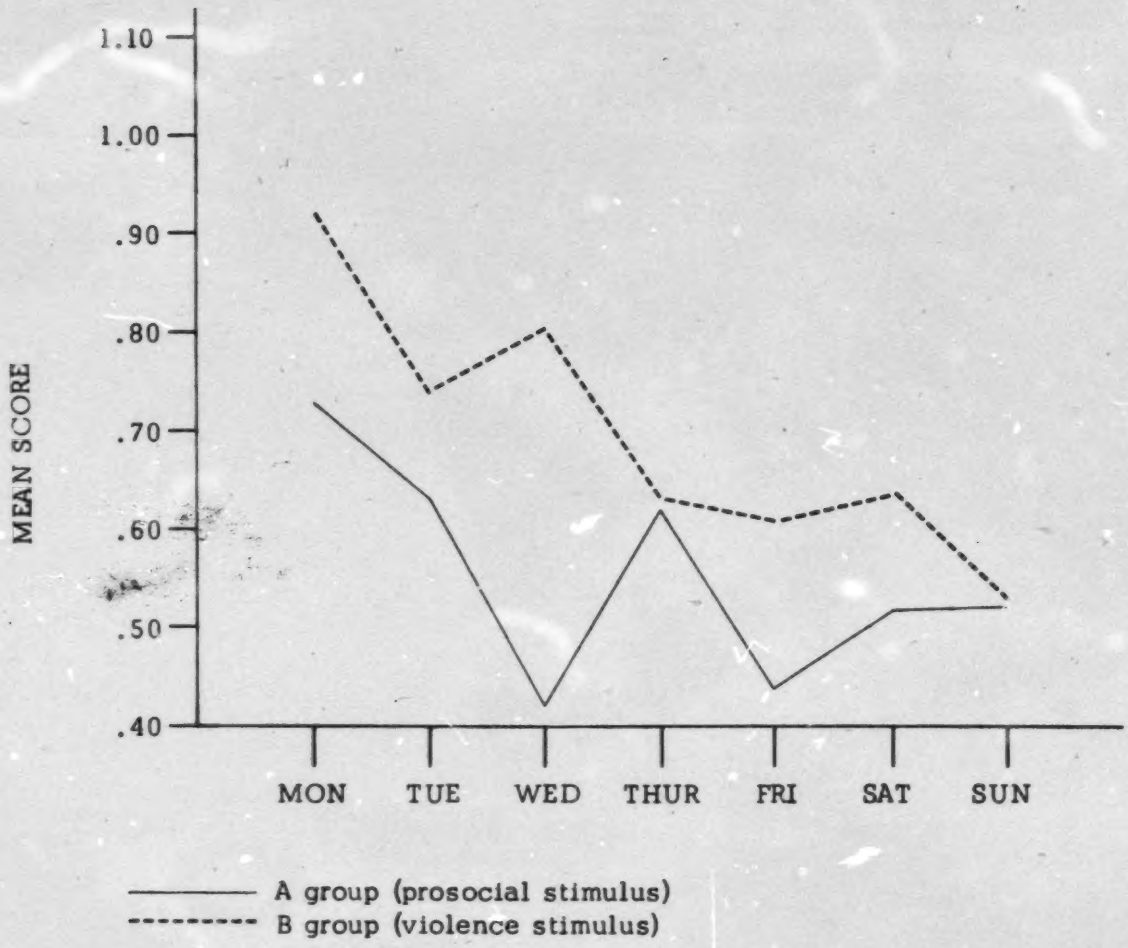
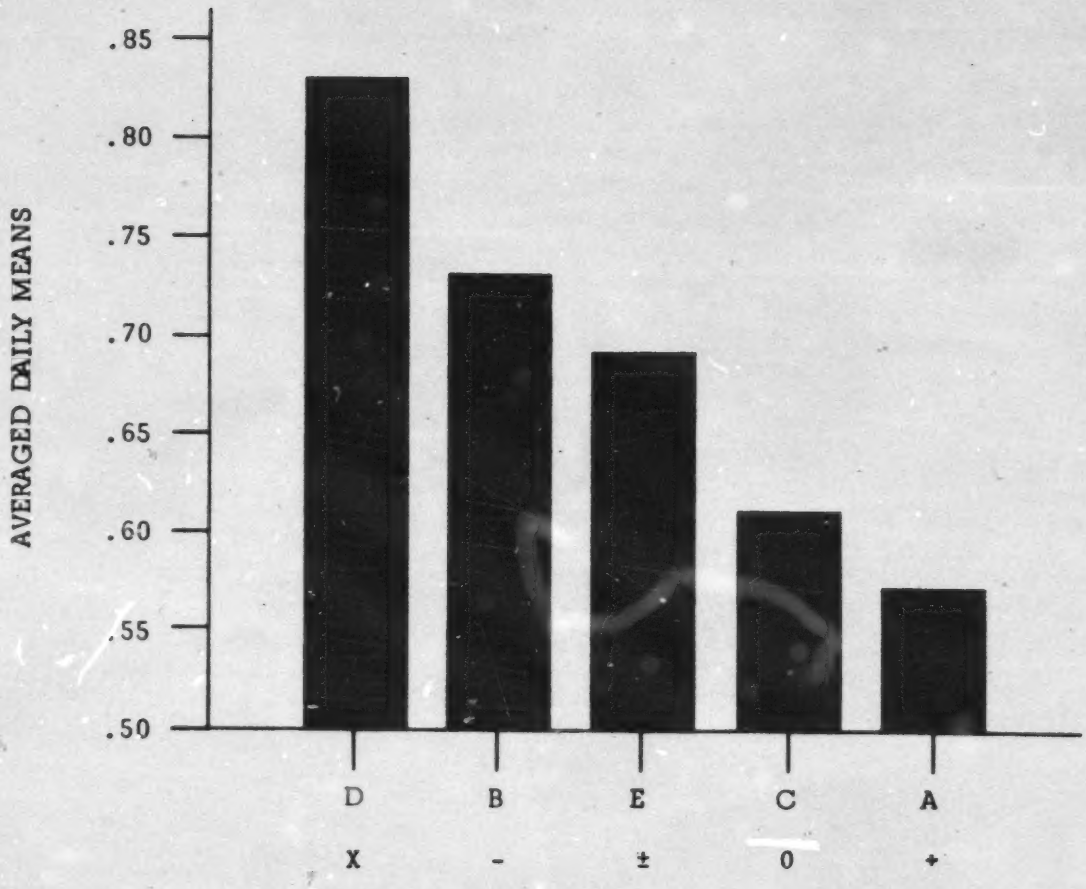


FIGURE 9

Linear Trend to Minus Behavior for All Groups



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